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ABSTRACT

The difficulties of the role of education in promoting a culture of universal human value and effectiveness need to be considered and analyzed from a global perspective. Section 1 addresses three main problems in cultural and educational developments: (1) education for all based on local context; (2) common values identified and emphasized; and (3) social sciences role established. Section 2 discusses the interrelationship of education and culture and the cross-disciplinary sets of problems in many curriculums and programs. Section 3 suggests that two foreign languages are a reasonable goal for all. Section 4, the last section, reviews challenging features of the present world situation and provides five question to use for debates. (CK)

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CONTRIBUTION OF EDUCATION TO CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

"New cultural dimensions and new educational approaches: problems and perspectives"

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NEW CULTURAL DIMENSIONS AND NEW EDUCATIONAL APPROACHES: PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVES

0. Preamble

In the field we are dealing with, that of the role of education in promoting a culture of universal human value and effectiveness, we are naturally inclined, as educators, to have a somewhat optimist attitude.

This is a risky attitude if we have not considered and analysed all the difficulties to face, in a global perspective.

Therefore in this paper

0.1 I will first present some cases of particularly intricated ambivalences and difficulties, suggesting that they cannot be overlooked neither in cultural nor in educational developments.

0.2. Secondly I will cope with the issue of interrelations between culture and education which can be theoretically identified as coincident, but practically show a certain sequential relation (education tends to be chiefly transmission of a consolidated culture). But it is noted that the dramatic problems we have to face in the present world situation put education and culture much closer together, so that education not only prepare the soil for later cultural developments, but directly stimulates them by advancing pressing doubts and problems.

0.3. Then linguistic problems will be sketchly treated in the ambitious perspective of a multisided competence in several languages, open to further enrichment when needed in new situations.

0.4. Finally the most challenging features of the present world situation will be recalled in order to remind and emphasize their revolutionary implications for what our conception on our ways of conceiving the relation between past and future. Teachers' ability to consequently reshape their frame of mind can be assumed as probable, even if not granted, and women's role is stressed in such a change, both in society and in schools.

1. Main problems

1.1. Education for all

Formal, non-formal and informal education are the main factors of cultural development, which should be promoted everywhere in the world. But educational performances and attainments obviously depend on local context (the already existing cultural background, human and material resources, etc.).

The net result is that educational action develops and succeeds very unevenly and today tends to increase rather than to reduce the differences in economic development and in "quality of life" between the highly developed and the less developed societies. On the mondial market the average product of one hour of work of a developed country producer may be equivalent to the product of ten or twenty hours of work performed in an underdeveloped country. This happens because in the first product is incorporated a good deal of scientific, technological and organizational skills, the major part of which is, directly or indirectly, achieved through education. The correlations between the average length of school attendance and the welfare indicators in the different countries are generally very high. (Such indicators include pro-capite gross national product, and average length of life, besides illiteracy rate). But the hope that "more education for all" can easily reduce the gap is unrealistic. Given the factual conditions, educational efforts can in the short term only widen it. This is particularly true for what scientific and technological education are concerned. But literary, aesthetic, historical and philosophical education are also considered today very important for the promotion of a flexible, creative set of attitudes, needed for democratic citizenship but also for a high level productivity.

This does not mean that "education for all" is not a good aim to be pursued everywhere. It is the basic condition for human equality. But it should be necessary to avoid the negative side-effects, highly probable in the present situation for what chiefly the economic gap is concerned. Education works much better where a good educational level is already largely diffused and this particularly in the field of technological continuous improvement. Surely education must be developed in all countries, but in new and more ambitious ways. Education should produce not only high-level productive skills, but, chiefly in the most advanced countries, also attitudes to utilize them for international aid, devoting to it a good share of our surplus. Moreover technological innovations should always be adopted in a cooperative way attentive to local needs, respecting local cultures and traditions as far as possible, and chiefly local and global environmental constraints. New models of development shall be discovered and implemented. It is extremely difficult to do all this on a worldwide scale, surely impossible in a short

time. Supernational legislation and action seem necessary conditions, based of course on a moral attitude and a cognitive awareness to be achieved chiefly trough education. But we need a new type of education, overcoming the gap between the so called "two cultures" (the literary-humanistic and the scientific-technological). Unfortunately this traditional gap has not been reduced too much, since C.P. Snow denounced it in his famous pamphlet The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1959), in spite of the fact that a "third culture", that of the human empirical sciences, is developing as a bridge between them. Such a need of cultural integration regards all countries striving for devolpment, as well as the most developed ones: mankind as a whole should improve very rapidly both objective knowledge and emotional participation to the common problems.

1.2. Common values

I fully agree that we need to identify and emphasize common values in the different cultures, traditions and religions. But in fact the present landscape of the world is connoted by new tensions and often bloody conflits, chiefly on ethnical and religious grounds. What education can do, beyond preaching brotherhood, is to point out positive actions aimed to reduce tensions, and to find convergent trends. When possible it should also encourage initiatives of encounters at grass-root level. UNESCO is already engaged in a set of activities in the field, but they are not known and documented enough. Much more work can and must be done for furnishing schools of suitable materials. But their educational implementation needs new skills and attitudes developed by teachers. And teachers are "naturally" conditioned by their cultural and religious background: in general only a few are ready and willing to change.

Therefore a huge effort seems to be necessary in order to overcome the factual situation, and without any guarantee of success. An effort, of course, not limited to the educational field. A positive result can only be the outcome of synergical action. Philosophy can have an important role. Which are the common human values? Equality, freedom, brotherhood? But are they not often considered just "western" values? On the contrary I think they are, common, universal values imbedded in most cultures, even if in somewhat different forms. But the problem is not easy to be solved. However discussing it seriously in an international and intercultural perspective gives hope to find some solutions for the future.

One danger to avoid is surely to stress to much potential universal features despising particular beliefs and local values embodied in traditions, rites, legends and "primitive" types of religions. Modern anthropology can help very much, chiefly if supported by cultiveted aesthetic appreciation, extended also to musical experience.

This means that all educators engaged in such an endeavour should check the opportunities open by the programmes and the implemented curricula, and plan together suitable integrations,

possibly in form of active experiences, so that mutual understanding can be enhanced without rejecting anything truly human, no matters how curious and unusual it might appear.

But there are obvious limitations: school curricula cannot be overloaded. An intelligent choice is needed, and rich choices open to the students, if schools have to offer a balanced combination of the different dimensions of culture, including aesthetic appreciation. But such a selection must be made by an agreement on common final tasks and flexible methods, rather than by detailed universal syllabus. Each country, each culture, have not only a different literature and artistic heritage, but even different scientific and chiefly technological traditions to be carefully taken into account. Otherwise they risk cultural alienation.

The volume titled The Contents of Education.A worldwide view of their development from the present to the year 2000, by S. Rassekh and G. Vaideanu (published by Unesco, 1987) represents a good example of such a line of tendential universalition of education: it does not give receipts, nor a list of topics, but presents problems like population growth and economic and social-political changes in their historical development, presents possible approaches, chiefly inter- and multidisciplinary, and suggests that in the teacher training a priority should be deserved to the "impact of the ? current world problems on education", such as environmental education, education for peace, co-operation and the promotion of humanism in relations between peoples and individuals, education for democracy, participation, development (p. 258). The book is chiefly aimed to solicitate teachers' creativity in the different countries and original educational research even in the less developed ones. If books like this might be discussed everywhere in the world when new curricula are build up, such an exercise would really promote positive changes in education for a worlwide culture without any danger of artificial homogeneity.

1.3. Social sciences

History, geography, economics, civics deserve a growing role in a modern process of education aiming to an updated culture, provided their teaching is strongly improved. This is generally recognized, and a lot of work has already been done in the last decades in several countries to ameliorate sillabuses and textbooks, and give coherence and consistency to the social sciences as a whole.

But some important problems are not settled. History teaching can widen the gap within peoples having a history and peoples not having it (the Kulturvölker and the Naturvölker of some German debatable Historism). It should be shown that this distinction is only relative, and that "progress" and even development is a very ambigous concept. Secondly Economics should be historically developed until tackling the main phenomena of international trade and of the so called "iniquitous rate of exchange" between developed and less developed countries, showing its roots not only in the old and new colonialism, but mainly in the

overwhelming but unbalanced expansion of scientifically grounded technologies, and of related problems of demographic explosion and consequent slow growth of universal school education in the Southern world.

Without being made capable of going in some depth discussing such subjects, young people would not realize the dramatic complexity of the problems affecting the development possibility of the South of the world. Somebody might prefer to feed optimistic illusions about perspectives of relatively easy progress, in order to elicitate positive or even enthusiastic attitudes in most people involved in such problems. But if we wish to spare them in a future a disruptive shock and a complete loss of confidence when confronted with reality, the right thing to do is to honestly present the challenges we have to face. This is, of course, a very risky choice, to be analysed and discussed in advance.

In this same field, also civics (or political education) needs to be radically renewed. It should be expanded two sides at the same time, if it has to fit for present tendencies: towards local, particular loyalties (related to regions, little ethnic, linguistic and cultural minorities, religious communities) and towards new larger political aggregates and chiefly world citizenship. There are implied big and urgent issues, as the establishment of a permanent international or overnational military power under full control by the United Nations. An historical "long duration" overview can give some aid: the number of political units existing in the world is diminishing in time, if we assume the term "units" as meaning human aggregates even very small, but free from any external authority and enforced rule. Some experts assert that they can be extimated having been about 500.000 in the year 1.000 B.C., 200.000 in the 2nd Century A.C., and are reduced to 200 today. Extrapolating the curve, in 2300 just one political power should exist. But the process has been until now chiefly grounded on conquest by war. Presently war might mean the destruction of humanity. (I am referring to Robert Carneiro's papers from '80 to '88, quoted by Marvin Harris Our kind, Harper & Row, New York, 1991). However a parallel evolution concerns liberal-democratic states on our planet: three at the end of the 18th Century, more than 70 now. The two developments, considered together, can give some hope that world unification might be pursued and implemented democratically, provided we will be educated in time for such a difficult enterprise.

A serious set of problems, of course, however difficult to be avoided in a changing world which needs to achieve a peaceful unity, but at the same time should respect and enhance pluralism. No easy solution is at our disposal, but only new rich and challenging themes of debate are open.

2. Education and culture

2.1. Are they different things?

The few issues debated so far are emblematic instances of several changes (and enrichments) already taking place in our culture, but not fast enough, I am afraid, to ensure the survival of humanity. Culture and education are strictly related, Greek and Hellenistic humanism unified them under the same term, paideia, and even the Latin term cultura means cultivation of minds. But traditionally education, chiefly in its formal and institutionalized versions, follows cultural innovation after some time-lag , with the exception of higher education (but not always and everywhere).

Very rarely education is an heuristic activity, jointly carried on by teachers and students and producing really new knowledge, new not only for the learners. This is, of course, one of the highest ideal goal of progressive education, but it can be very seldom attained.

What I would like to stress, just about the issues mentioned and discussed above, is that valuable education and first-hand culture seem to be much more strictly related and vitally interacting than usually.

The general theme of Working Group I spells "Taking the cultural dimension into account in educational programmes, including basic education and literacy". This formulation might be improved: it now seems a truism, because educational programmes cannot take in account anything else beside the "cultural dimension", including all aspects of culture as defined in several UNESCO documents. But using the plural "dimensions" the same phrase becomes highly meaningful and interesting, just on the ground of the remarks we did above.

Which cultural dimensions are now and/or ought to be in the future better utilized in education? The more traditional in the sense of "classical" or even of local, cultural features, linked to the particular "identity" of an ethnical, linguistic or religious group? Or the more universal and "modern", where "modern" chiefly includes sciences and technologies, but also the problems of human rights, peaceful coexistence and world order?

A very ambitious aim, already stated in this paper but to be further stressed, should be to try not to overlook any "cultural dimensions", to implement a type of education as multisided or "multidimensional" as possible. But this cannot be put in existence just adding pieces of culture, bits of informations, in an inconsistent whole. Educational success is linked not only to a balanced and not overwhelming set of meaningful interrelated elements, but also inspired by a creative general design. Such a design should be a common task to be carried on at different levels: the individual teacher, teams of educators and experts, local and national bodies for curriculum construction, supernational and worldwide agencies of various kind. And this is just what happens in a great majority of situations around the world, but surely not enough and not always in the best way. This scene of a cooperative force aimed to build up not a unique

world-wide curriculum, but the best ways of pursuing the best solutions in the different places, would be an interesting, perhaps fascinating object of further enquiry, but surely a very difficult one without a real world-wide cooperation.

2.2. Cross-disciplinary sets of problems

Programmes and implemented curricula seem to have been recently renewed in most countries of the world, chiefly in order to include sets of problems of great public interest, most of them of complex multidisciplinary character. I hope that the country answers to the questionnaire diffused in view of this World Conference will furnish enough information about ecological education, development education, multicultural and intercultural education, and so on, included perhaps peace education as an all embracing theme. Each of these rather new educational enterprises implies a range of cultural contents very diversified from a strictly traditional disciplinary point of view. From such a review the methodological approaches would surely emerge less clearly, as well as the interaction with different kinds of agencies, public and private, associations, movements of voluntary services, non-governmental organizations linked to UNESCO, and so on. But about this we should discuss exhaustively during the Group I Sessions. And even we should there check hypoteses like the following ones:

2.2.1. Discussing and doing researches on topics of this kind, teachers and students, while needing and pursuing solid general scientific grounds in several fields, require first-hand new informations, often looking for direct contacts with specialists, who are sometimes challenged by the questions presented to them. Circular interaction between education and culture seems to be particularly tight when such problems are seriously explored.

2.2.2. In these field human interactions are particularly important and fruitful: discussions, within classes and schools, group researches, visits to institutions, friendly meetings with "outsiders", worldwide exchanges of students and teachers, national and international correspondence, sometimes telematic, exchange of audio-visual and computer soft-ware, and so on.

3. Local and foreign languages

How many languages a potential world citizen ought to master? If we like humor, we can answer: just one if English is his mother-tongue, three or four if he is a black South-African (local dialect, regional indigenous tongue, Flemish, English).

This means that the language problem, in the perspective of an effective "education for all" open to worldwide exchanges,

shows strong political constraints, not easy to overcome.

But a more "human" as well as a more realistic and future looking consideration of the problem suggest that two foreign languages could be a reasonable target for all, without sacrifying some familiarity at least with a local minority language or dialect, if necessary or useful. Probably (and international research prompted by UNESCO might gather better evidence) people mastering several languages can easily learn additional ones, as most anthropologists do. In some countries to have all educated people speaking three languages is an already pursued target. Such a target can be more easily attained if different languages are utilized as instrument for different subject matters. But this practice cannot be generalized beyond the naturally multilingual territories without special efforts in teacher training.

4. Final remarks: past and future

For the first time in its history, humanity is facing the possibility of being completely destroyed, perhaps together with most metazoic life. Nuclear holocaust and nuclear winter seem now almost averted, but stratospheric ozon destruction and greenhouse effect are growing risks, together with large scale and local pollution, climate change, forest destruction, and so on. Population explosion makes extremely difficult to plan controls internationally agreed upon, and to avoid that "third world" development follows the highly polluting traditional lines. Even AIDS and drug are planetary problems. Even the most important criminal organizations, as "mafia", and connected or similar unlawful nets around the world, by now displays characters of international powers of a new type, controlling a flow of money of the size of the budget of a big single state. Therefore only an international very resolute action can give hope of defeating them. Through newspapers and chiefly electronic media we are all daily confronted with such frightful problems, because we are living from this point of view in a "global village". But the communication means are monopolized by a few countries. The possibility of solving the main problems without limiting very much any serious development and the very right of life of the poorer majority of mankind is hardly considered, much less analysed in terms of (huge) costs.

From this point of view education and culture, tightly allied, should be able to utilize the media, but with a highly critical and selective approach. School must make choices in the field of culture, because it cannot overburden the pupils: to exploit other sources of information is highly necessary, the exposure to them being unavoidable anyway.

But formal education is called also to stimulate deeper analyses of any pertinent available information, chiefly from the moral and social point of view. And in this field we are now, again for the first time in history, compelled to think and chiefly to make projects in very wide spacial and temporal terms. We have to care for the future generations, even of people very

different and far from us. Moreover, we are compelled to think in terms of high uncertainty, at least in the sense that the dangers to avoid are not completely proved scientifically, and anyway not exactly situated in the future.

Therefore to think in terms of probability becomes a moral necessity, remaining a difficult exercise. But in order to understand this "futurological" dimension we must seriously know the past. Otherwise we cannot realize neither its dramatic novelty nor utilize lasting aspect of the old wisdom. I think of the classical ethics of moderation and modesty, as well as of the integration of man with nature exhibited at its best by "primitive" people.

Even sciences and technologies cannot be fully understood out from a historical (and epistemological) frame.

All these features connote a modern culture respectful of the past and concerned about the future. Education is naturally moving in the same direction. Teachers surely have a heavy task, but a task fascinating enough for making us hope they can engage in coping with it.

Most teachers around the world are women. A more balanced distribution may be desirable, but I cannot refrain from observing that girls and women can be perhaps most vocated for the type of education we need, both as learners and as teachers. They have, on the average, the same intellectual potentialities of males, but more sensitivity , more flexibility and less spirit of competition. So different cultures as the arcaic Middle-eastern and the Chinese Taoist identify the feminine gender with the earth: maybe they are the better fitted for having care of the Earth, Gaia, and of the life on it, included humanity.

QUESTIONS FOR THE DEBATE

1) Why the paper starts denouncing the risk of optimism in dealing with the perspectives of the role of education for all in solving the main problems of mankind?

2) Which are the most difficult obstacles to overcome if we want that educational progress really stirs up economic and democratic development in all countries?

3) Which are the other main actions to be implemented, besides educational aid and co-operation, in order to produce really international progress and mutual understanding?

4) Why the paper insist so much on the need of establishing a real over-national, worldwide and democratic power, a United Nations Organization much stronger than presently?

5) Which kind of problems are cited, the resolution of which seems practically impossible without such a worldwide organisation?